

HI-PO THE HIPPO

*Lithographs by RUTH GANNETT
Story by DOROTHY THOMAS*





BABOON
The Broadway Library
of
Portia



Peter Starr

Aug 1942





Hi-Po the Hippo

To Rosie,
the Dainty Pink Hippopotamus
at the
Central Park Zoo

Hi-Po the Hippo

Lithographs by Ruth Gannett



Story by Dorothy Thomas

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The illustrations for this book were drawn directly on stone by Ruth Gannett

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ONE fine morning when Mr. Hippo was ballooning his cheeks with the good waffles Mrs. Hippo had made for him and was looking very cheerful and not a bit cross, Mrs. Hippo said, "Dear, there's something I wish we had."



"I wish we had a little boy! I wish we had a fine little hippo boy who looked just like you, don't you?"

Mr. Hippo stopped looking cheerful.



"No," he said, closing his ears and his nostrils firmly, as he brought his fist down on the table so hard that his cup jumped in the saucer. "I should say not. I don't like little boys! I don't

want one! They make too much noise. A little boy would be wanting me to read him the funnies when I want to read the news. He would track in mud and throw baseballs that would miss and go through neighbors' windows. He would bring home stray puppies; I hate puppies. He would take all your time, too. I don't want any little boys."

"All right," Mrs. Hippo said. "I'm sorry I said anything about it, but I still wish we had a little boy. I think he would be worth any bother he'd make."

"He would be worth nothing at all," Mr. Hippo said.

Just then there was a knock at the door. Mrs. Hippo got up from her chair and went to the door to see who was there. There was no one there. She looked down the street one way, and then down the street the other way.

"Who is it?" Mr. Hippo called. He was very impatient.

"It's nobody," Mrs. Hippo said.

"Somebody must be playing a trick," Mr. Hippo said. "Some boy must have knocked and then run away." He got up and went to the door, too.

"Here's something," Mrs. Hippo said. "Here's something I didn't notice. Look!"

Mr. Hippo looked where Mrs. Hippo was pointing, and there, half hidden in the tulips beside the doorstep, was a basket.



"It must be a present," Mrs. Hippo said as she reached down and picked up the basket. "Some friends must have brought it. They must have put it down, then knocked at the door, and then run away."

"Maybe it's a present," Mr. Hippo said, "and maybe it's a trick."

"We'll see," Mrs. Hippo said, and brought the basket in and set it on the table.

There was a cloth over the top of the basket.

"Did you see that?" Mrs. Hippo asked. "It *wiggled!*"

"What did I tell you?" Mr. Hippo said. "It's a trick!"

"Maybe it's a kitten," Mrs. Hippo said. "Or a little puppy, or a rabbit."

"I don't want any kittens, puppies or rabbits," Mr. Hippo said.

"We'll see what it is," Mrs. Hippo said, and lifted the cloth from the basket.

There, on a pillow, was—not a kitten, not a puppy or a rabbit, but a fine little hippo baby boy!

"Oh, look!" Mrs. Hippo said. "A baby boy!" She wanted to take him right out of the basket and hold him, but Mr. Hippo said, "Wait! It's a trick! Look, here's a letter!"

Sure enough, there was a letter pinned to the baby's blanket with a big gold safety pin.



"And there's a locket, hung from a chain around his neck," Mrs. Hippo said. "He must be an orphan."

"We'll see," said Mr. Hippo.

Mrs. Hippo unpinned the big gold safety pin, and Mr. Hippo put his glasses on and read the letter. It said:



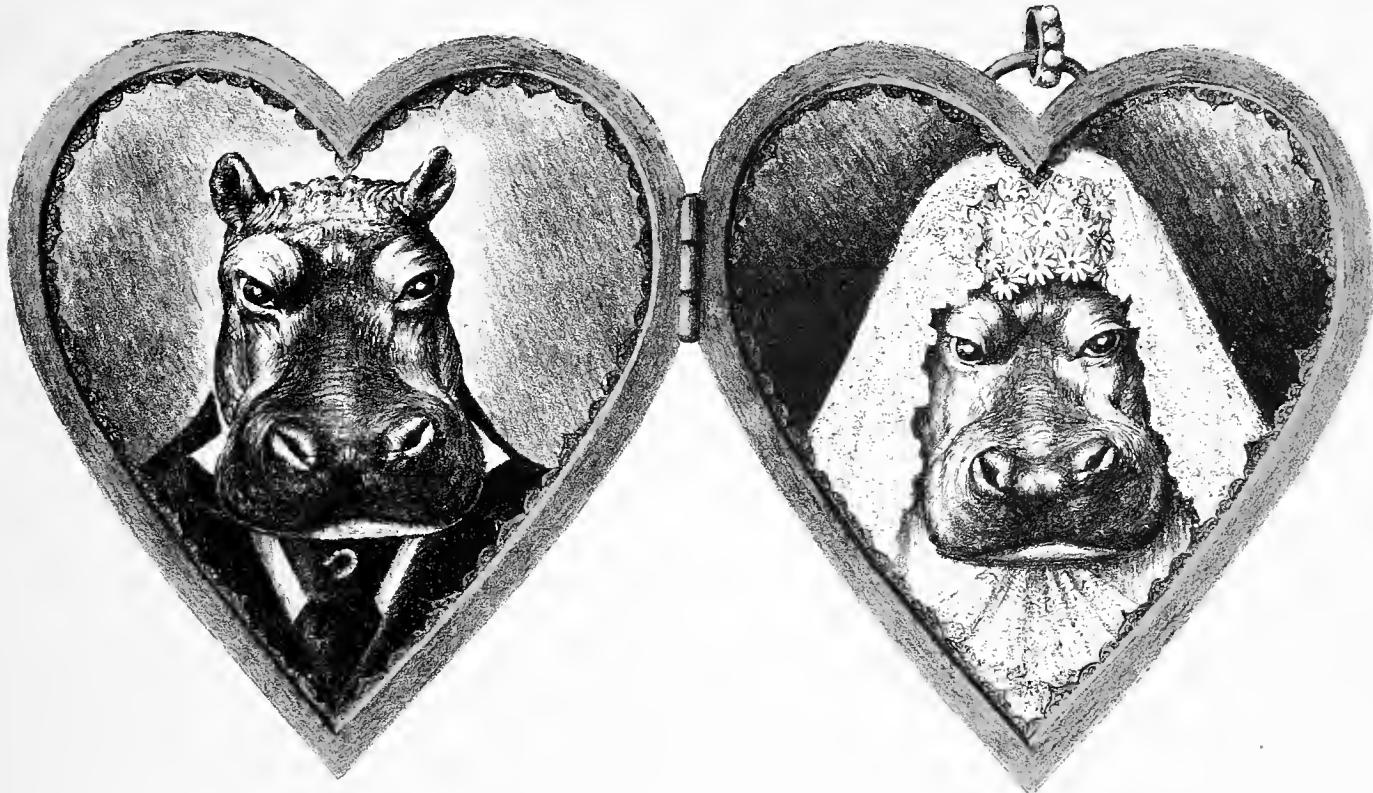
Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hippo:

Will you kindly take our little boy and keep him for your own? We are sorry to have to give him up, for we love him very much, but we must go away. Our pictures are in the locket. When he is old enough to understand, tell him how much we loved him and how proud we shall always be of him. Thank you for giving him a home. His name is Hi-Po.

Hi-Po's Papa and Mama.

Mr. Hippo looked very cross.

Mrs. Hippo opened the locket and held it where Mr. Hippo could see the two pictures in it. "Look what a fine-looking papa he has, and what a sweet, pretty mama," she said.



She started to lift the baby out of the basket, but Mr. Hippo stopped her. "What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I'm going to pick him up and give him a kiss," Mrs. Hippo said, "and tell him how glad we are to have him."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Mr. Hippo said. "Leave him right in the basket, and take him back where he came from."

“How can we take him back?” asked Mrs. Hippo. “We don’t know where he came from or who brought him. Let’s keep him. They’ve given him to us. He’s a present.”

“I don’t want him.” Mr. Hippo was firm. “I told you, only a little while ago, I don’t like little boys. We’ll take him to the police station—that’s where we’ll take him. We’ll tell the police captain how we found him beside our doorstep, and they’ll take care of him.”

Mrs. Hippo looked down at the fine baby boy, who was sleeping as quietly as could be. “I want to keep him,” she said. “I don’t want to take him to the police station.”

“Then I’ll take him,” Mr. Hippo said. “Get my hat and stick.”

Mrs. Hippo brought them. After Mr. Hippo had put on his coat and hat, he picked up the basket, with the baby in it, and told his wife good-bye and went out the door and down the street.

He had gone only a block when he met a neighbor who said, “Good morning. What have you in your basket?”

“It’s not my basket,” Mr. Hippo said, and hurried on before his neighbor could ask him any more questions.

When he had gone another block he met two friends. “Good morning,” they said. One of them asked, “What have you in the basket?” Mr. Hippo didn’t want to explain. He pretended not to



hear their question at all and said, "A fine morning, isn't it?" and started to hurry on.

Just then the baby hippo woke up and cried.

"What's this?" one of the friends asked. "Is that a baby? I didn't know you had a baby!"

"It's not mine," said Mr. Hippo. "It is just a baby someone left at my house. I'm taking it to the police station."

Three little boys came along and stopped to listen.

“Whose baby is it?” one of the friends asked.

“I don’t know and I don’t care,” Mr. Hippo said. “All I know is that I don’t want it, and I’m taking it to the police station. Good-bye.”

He hurried on and the three little boys followed him. The baby kept right on crying. Soon three other little boys followed, and then three more, and soon a dozen little boys were following Mr. Hippo. Mr. Hippo was furious. He turned around and yelled at the little boys: “Stop following me! Go on about your business and stop *following* me!” Still another little boy came running across the street. “What’s he got?” he called to the crowd of boys who were now trailing Mr. Hippo. “What’s he got in the basket?”









"A baby!" all the little boys yelled together.

"Did he steal it?" the new little boy asked.

"We don't know," the boys said.

"Where's he going with it?" the new boy wanted to know.

"To the police station," they yelled.

"Is he going to give himself up?" the little boy asked.

Mr. Hippo was walking very fast. The baby was crying as hard as he could, and waving his fists and kicking his little feet. Mr. Hippo looked behind him and saw seventeen little boys and three dogs following, and it made him even more furious. Then he saw a policeman. The policeman saw him too, with all the boys following, and began to run toward Mr. Hippo.

"What's in that basket?" the policeman asked.

Mr. Hippo had been walking too fast to have any breath left.





He just shoved the basket into the policeman's hands, and turned and ran. The policeman handed the basket to another policeman who came running up, and dashed after Mr. Hippo. The seventeen little boys and three dogs dashed after him, too. The policeman who had the basket wanted to join in the chase but he thought it might not be good for the baby, so he just stood still and blew his whistle. More policemen came running from every direction, and he sent them all chasing after Mr. Hippo.

Soon the police wagon came. It too dashed after Mr. Hippo.





A man came running up. "Where's the fire?" he asked. "I'll send in an alarm." The policeman knew there wasn't any fire, but he was blowing his whistle so hard and the baby was crying so loudly he couldn't hear. So the man turned in the alarm. Soon the fire wagons and engines came clanging down the street. People were leaning out of the windows to look.



They caught Mr. Hippo. When he turned around to look again and saw dozens of little boys and policemen, the police wagon and the fire engines and the hook and ladder carts chasing him, he thought he might as well give up. So he did give up. They put him into the police wagon and a policeman said, "Now what did you do?"



"I didn't do anything," Mr. Hippo said. "I was taking the baby to the police station...."

"Why were you taking your baby to the police station?"

"It's not my baby," Mr. Hippo said.

"Did you steal it?" the policeman wanted to know.

"Of course not!" Mr. Hippo said. "I don't like babies. You couldn't give me one."

"Did someone try to give you one?" the policeman asked.

"Yes," Mr. Hippo said. "That's exactly what happened. Somebody tried to give me a baby and I wouldn't have it and I was taking it down to the police station."

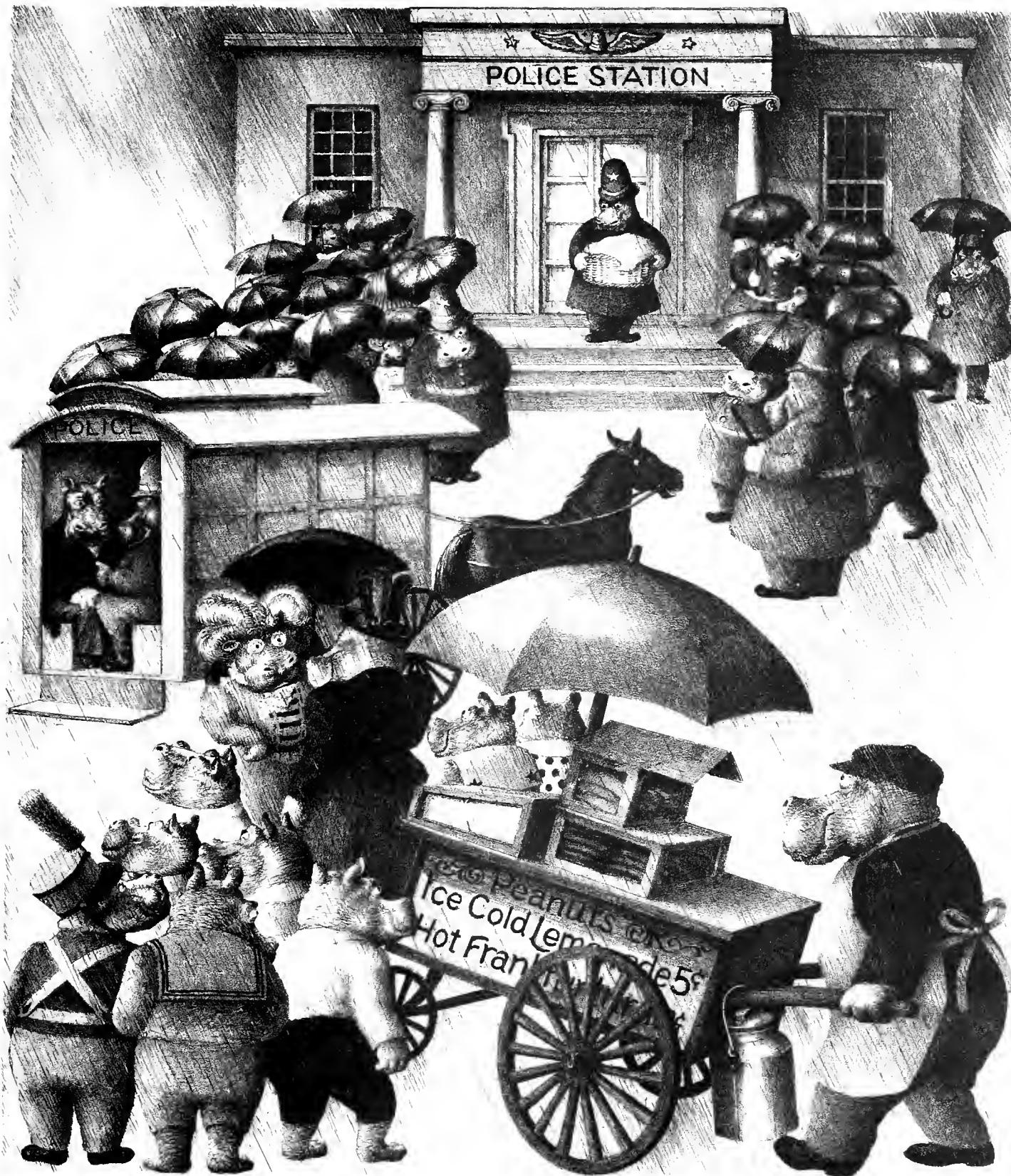
"You tell that to the captain," the policeman said.

"I'll be glad to," said Mr. Hippo crossly.

When they got to the station house it had started to rain. The policeman with the baby and all the other people were there ahead of them waiting to see Mr. Hippo get out of the police wagon.

Somebody said, "He stole the baby and was running away with it, and some brave little boys caught him, and took the baby away from him and gave it to a policeman."

"No, he gave it to the policeman himself," somebody else said. "I saw him do it. He gave the baby to the policeman and ran away. He's a terrible man. He ought to be ashamed of himself."



Inside the station house the baby kept right on crying and the policemen did their best to quiet him. Some of them blew their whistles for him. One of them rattled his keys for him, and another made faces and said, "Bo-bo-bo-bo-bo-bo-bo," which, he said, almost always made babies stop crying, but this baby would not stop.



"Give him to his old man," one of the policemen said. "Maybe he can make him stop."

"He's not my baby," Mr. Hippo said. "I never saw him before."

"What do you mean, saying you never saw him before?" the policeman asked. "Weren't you running away with him this morning?"

"Yes," Mr. Hippo said. "I meant I never saw him before this morning. I tell you he's not mine."

"Well," the policeman said, "you said you ran away with him."

"The captain is ready to see you now," still another officer said. "And everything you say will be used against you."

The captain was sitting behind a big desk. He asked what Mr. Hippo had done to cause so much trouble. All the policemen started to tell the captain but he could not hear. The baby was making too much noise.

"Can't you keep your baby quiet?" the captain asked.

"He's not my baby," Mr. Hippo said firmly. So the captain told the policemen to quiet the baby, and they all tried. But the baby just kept on crying.

The captain asked Mr. Hippo to come close and tell his story, and Mr. Hippo tried, but the baby was crying louder than he could talk, and the captain could hear only every third word that Mr. Hippo was saying.



"Take the baby outside!" the captain said at last. So they took the baby away, and Mr. Hippo told his story. He told how he was eating waffles, how there was a knock at the door, how Mrs.

Hippo opened the door and looked up and down the street and saw nobody, and how they found the basket among the tulips beside the front step, and brought it in and put it on the table. “There was a note,” Mr. Hippo said, “and a locket with his parents’ pictures in it.”

“Bring them in,” the captain said.

A policeman went out to get the letter and the locket. But when he came back, he said, “There ain’t no locket and there ain’t no letter.”

“Say *is*,” the police captain said. Then he looked at Mr. Hippo sadly, and shook his head. He thought Mr. Hippo had made up a story and told it.

“There *was* a letter and there *was* a locket,” Mr. Hippo said. “Call my wife and she’ll tell you there was. I must have left them on the table at home.”

“Send for Mrs. Hippo,” said the captain, “and tell her to bring the letter and the locket.”

They waited and waited. At last two policemen came in with Mrs. Hippo.

When she saw Mr. Hippo without his hat or stick which he had lost on the way, she ran to him and said, “Darling, whatever is the matter?”

“Did you bring the letter and the locket?” the captain asked.



"Indeed I did," Mrs. Hippo said, and smiled. She opened her pocketbook and took out the letter and the locket and laid them on the captain's desk.

The baby was brought in again. "Show me just how it was when you found it," the captain shouted.

"I'll be glad to," Mrs. Hippo said. Quickly she fastened the locket chain around the baby's neck, and folded the letter and pinned it in place. "There!" she said. "That's just the way it was!"

The captain was watching with his fingers in his ears, for the baby was still crying loudly.

“Madam,” he said at last, “can you quiet the baby?”

“I’ll try,” Mrs. Hippo said. She picked the baby up and patted him and cooed at him; but he would not open his eyes and look at her, and he would not stop crying. He waved his arms and cried still louder.





"Here!" the captain said. "I'll stop him. "*"I'll stop him myself!"*" He took the baby and walked up and down the room, bouncing the baby in his arms and saying, "There, there, there!"

He'd seen somebody quiet another baby that way, but this baby wouldn't stop.

"Here," the captain suddenly said to Mr. Hippo. "*You* take him."

"I don't want him," said Mr. Hippo.

"Please take him, dear," Mrs. Hippo said.

"I don't want him," Mr. Hippo repeated firmly. "I don't like babies. I don't like little boys."

"Take him," the captain said. So Mr. Hippo held out his arms and took the baby. He was furious.

"Now quiet him," the captain said.

"I don't know how," Mr. Hippo yelled back.

"Speak to him. Call him by name," the captain shouted. "Sing to him."

"I can't sing," Mr. Hippo said.

"Try, dear," said Mrs. Hippo. "Don't hold him far off, like that. Hold him close to you and sing. His name is Hi-Po. Remember?" She patted the letter.

Mr. Hippo held the baby close and sang:

"Go to sleep, Hi-Po,
Go to sleep, dear,
Go to sleep, Hi-Po,
Daddy is here."



He sang that because it was the only song he could think of. It was a song he remembered hearing when he was a little boy himself. Then a wonderful thing happened. Suddenly the baby stopped crying! Little Hi-Po rested his head on Mr. Hippo's shoulder, sighed sweetly and went right to sleep.

"He's asleep," the captain whispered. "Sound asleep!"

"Well, what do you know about that?" said Mr. Hippo, looking around triumphantly. "I sang to him and he went to sleep."

"Do you want to put him back in the basket?" one of the policemen asked.

"I don't think I'd risk it," the captain said. "I think you'd better carry him."

"Yes," said Mr. Hippo. "I'd better just carry him."

Three policemen went ahead, on tiptoe, to open doors. Each had his finger at his lips, saying, "Sh!"

Another policeman came, on tiptoe, with the basket. The captain put the letter and the locket on the pillow, and gave the basket to Mrs. Hippo to carry.

"Good-bye," he whispered.

Mr. Hippo just nodded. He was afraid to speak. He was afraid of waking the baby.

The three policemen tiptoed ahead, clear to the big front door, saying, "Sh!" to every policeman they met.



Out on the street, Mr. Hippo walked very carefully, holding the baby close to him. This time no little boys came to follow, for Mr. and Mrs. Hippo looked like any father and mother out walking, father carrying the baby and mother carrying a basket.

Back in their own house, Mrs. Hippo set the basket down on the table and said, "Do you suppose I could take him now, without waking him?"

"I don't know," Mr. Hippo said. "Maybe you had better fix the basket and let *me* put him in it."

"All right," whispered Mrs. Hippo, and she smoothed the pillow, and Mr. Hippo carefully laid Hi-Po down.

Hi-Po did not wake. Mr. Hippo smiled. Then he whispered to his wife: "Will you bring me my other hat and my other stick?"

"Where are you going?" Mrs. Hippo whispered back.

"I'm going downtown," Mr. Hippo said in a whisper, "to buy a rocking horse and a football, and a little red wagon, and a . . ."

Mr. Hippo hesitated.

"And a what?" asked Mrs. Hippo.

"Don't you think it was wonderful," Mr. Hippo said, "the way he went to sleep when I sang to him?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Hippo. "And what else was it you were going to buy for him?"

Mr. Hippo looked at her and started to say something. Then he picked up his hat and opened the door. "And—" he said, as he walked down the front steps, "and—" he added without turning back to see whether Mrs. Hippo was laughing at him, "and a black and white puppy!"









